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OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE REVIEW
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
First session
6-10 June 1994
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the World Federation of United Nations Associations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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The World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA), an international non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I, submits this statement to the Open-Ended Working Group for its consideration on this most important review process.

The "raison d'être" of WFUNA is to promote public understanding of the United Nations and to mobilize public support for its activities. The Federation is comprised of over 80 national United Nations associations, located in all regions of the world, two thirds of which are in developing countries. Our aim is to bring the "people" closer to the United Nations and the United Nations closer to the "people".

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

Human beings have, throughout history, organized themselves into groups to pursue common ideas and goals. Some well-known examples in recent times are the international movements for disarmament and peace, environmental groups, the anti-apartheid coalitions and the world-wide mobilization for the rights of women. Also, more recently, we have witnessed the growing importance of national and international groups concerned with sustainable development and human rights issues. All these groups have, naturally, sought an international outreach, wanted to establish world-wide networks and asked to be heard at the United Nations and its conferences.

WFUNA very warmly welcomes all those who want to work with the United Nations and we encourage the United Nations system to respond with equal warmth and openness. We have clearly stated, on several occasions, the need to open the United Nations doors as broadly as possible. Thus, we appeal to the Working Group to build on the positive experience of present arrangements and, more importantly, to provide for new opportunities for the participation of non-governmental organizations. We strongly urge the extension of participatory rights to those non-governmental organizations that do not now have consultative status. However, it is most important that any process of opening up the United Nations to new non-governmental organizations, whether national or international in scope, be structured, transparent and consistent.

We would like to request the Working Group to examine ways of arranging a series of informal consultations between the members of the Working Group and interested non-governmental organizations on an ongoing basis throughout the duration of the review. Such informal sessions would serve to ensure that decisions eventually taken by Member States reflect the fullest consultation and that they could claim the support of those parties most particularly affected. We in the Federation would welcome playing a useful role in assisting with the arrangements for such consultations. In our view, this is a matter of utmost urgency.

Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations provides for "arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations". In its resolution 1296 (XLIV), Part I, paragraphs 1-8, the Economic and Social Council specifies the requirements that must be fulfilled to obtain recognition as an international non-governmental organization and that, in fact, constitute the very definition of an international non-governmental organization. It is WFUNA's view that these provisions are adequate and should be strictly observed in granting consultative status. We feel that the definition of international non-governmental organizations contained in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) requires no change. However, we recognize that some changes may be required to address the question of the role of national non-governmental organizations and others in their relations with the Economic and Social Council. We are convinced that these accommodations should not diminish those participatory rights already acquired by non-governmental organizations in consultative status.

Furthermore, in connection with international conferences, we see the need to elaborate a definition of a national non-governmental organization, for the sake of clarity and consistency. We would like to emphasize that WFUNA advocates granting full participatory rights in United Nations conferences to

relevant non-governmental organizations not in consultative status but it is imperative that the legitimacy of those non-governmental organizations that wish to be accepted as observers be properly established in an orderly and transparent way.

Moreover, WFUNA is convinced that for the benefit of the substantive work of United Nations conferences, provisions for the participation of business groups, universities, municipalities, regional governments in Member States and other relevant entities must be devised. Although these groups do not fall into the category of non-governmental organizations, their expert contributions must be taken into account. We believe that it would be worth while to consider a separate form of recognition and procedures for consultation for these groups.

WFUNA wishes to stress that it is fully aware of the practical difficulties that might result if a great many non-governmental organizations are granted status with the Economic and Social Council or admitted to international conferences. We believe that practical problems should be addressed in practical ways, depending on the circumstances of each situation. Principles should not be diluted or tampered with merely to accommodate the expedient.

We are certain that consultations between the United Nations and the non-governmental organization community can address such practical problems, in an ad hoc way, if good will and trust are present. We also believe that this good will and trust can be created and maintained if the present review is conducted in an open and cooperative fashion. You can be assured of the fullest cooperation of our Federation in this regard. We are also convinced that forcing the creation of clusters or groupings, in advance, is unquestionable not the solution to this problem. An orderly and predictable process for accreditation to conferences which tests the viability of new groups will greatly assist. Also, the early establishment of liaison groups between the United Nations conference secretariat and the non-governmental organization community could alleviate some of the practical difficulties.

As far as consultative status is concerned, WFUNA finds that the present procedures for consultation with the Council, the commissions and other subsidiary organs of the Council are adequate. We know of cases where the representation of some non-governmental organizations with consultative status has not been of the highest order. However, over the years, the overall exercise of participatory rights by non-governmental organizations in consultative status has proven to be most effective.

Sadly, the rules that have been established for the Commission on Sustainable Development, have seriously curtailed the participatory rights of non-governmental organizations. We were disappointed that this vital and innovative new commission, through what we must assume was a failure to understand fully the implications of certain decisions, while attempting to open itself to greater participation by non-governmental organizations, greatly reduced the effectiveness of that participation.

Clearly, the arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations in international conferences convened by the United Nations are far from satisfactory and require prompt adoption of uniform and consistent

rules. Although the recent international conferences admitted more non-governmental organizations as observers than ever before, these non-governmental organizations were not granted any real participatory rights, nor were adequate seating arrangements provided.

In our opinion, the rules for United Nations conferences should grant non-governmental organizations in consultative status similar rights to those they enjoy with the Economic and Social Council, and these rights should be exercisable from the beginning of the preparatory process. These rules should be the same for non-governmental organizations in consultative status and for other non-governmental organizations admitted by special procedures as at UNCED and the World Conference on Human Rights. WFUNA is ready to submit concrete proposals concerning such rules at the appropriate time.

We also wish to point out that the term "accreditation" does not appear at all in Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV). Consultative status gives non-governmental organizations automatic access and participatory rights without any further scrutiny. It also carries with it the right to register as a participant during the sessions of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, as well as at United Nations conferences, without being "accredited".

We wish to make one additional point. There is an urgent need to upgrade and strengthen the resources of the NGO Unit in order for it to cope with its normal duties, to serve the Working Group and to meet the challenges it will face after the United Nations doors have been opened more widely.

Finally, we would like to assure the Open-Ended Working Group that we would be more than happy to share with it the expertise the WFUNA has acquired in its more than four decades as a non-governmental organization in consultative status and in its capacity as the only non-governmental organization whose sole and exclusive purpose is the advancement of the United Nations.

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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) represents 120 million working people on all five continents and in countries at all levels of development. About two thirds of the trade union organizations affiliated to ICFTU are in developing countries.

As one of the largest and most representative non-governmental organizations, ICFTU, by virtue of its category I consultative status, has a long record of cooperation with the United Nations. Recent developments, notably the United Nations focus on social issues and on sustainable development, have greatly accentuated the need for reinforcing and enhancing this cooperation.

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

While ICFTU welcomes the Economic and Social Council decision to review the consultative arrangements set out in its resolution 1296 (XLIV), recent experiences have given rise to serious concern that eventual changes in these arrangements might have results contrary to those being sought and weaken, rather than enhance, genuine NGO contribution.

ICFTU believes that the basic provisions of Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) remain valid and will need to be retained, if consultative status is to have any meaning. The placing of NGOs in different categories according to their representativeness and range of fields of competence is based on sound reasoning and practicality. An organization with a global constituency whose concerns cover the full range of activities of the Council, and indeed the entire United Nations, obviously functions in a manner very different from that of a smaller organization which concentrates on one issue.

The provision of Council resolution 1296 (XLIV), according to which "national organizations shall normally present their views through international non-governmental organizations to which they belong", is also based on realism and common sense. It would not seem rational to grant separate consultative status to national affiliates of organizations already in status. In the case of ICFTU alone, this would result in the addition of approximately 174 organizations, and it is easy to imagine that at that rate the number of NGOs would rapidly reach the million mark.

Accreditation to United Nations conferences has generally been handled in such a way as to allow for participation of relevant NGOs not in consultative status. Lately, this more liberal policy has tended to spill over to other meetings, resulting in a blurring of distinctions between organizations with global constituencies and national and local groups. This has seriously hampered the ability of major organizations to function effectively. Nowhere was this more in evidence than in the first substantive session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, where NGOs in consultative status lost their right to have their written statements issued as United Nations documents. They were also denied normal access to documentation and when requesting the floor, were pressured to form "coalitions" and "constituencies", notwithstanding the fact that international organizations, by definition, represent coalitions and networks. A number of speakers who were given the floor were simply identified as "an NGO representative" and presumed to speak on behalf of all NGOs present.

ICFTU submits that statements of ad hoc coalitions of organizations which basically represent a consensus reached among representatives who happen to be present at a particular meeting do not have the same weight as those of organizations with a global constituency and the potential to enlist massive support for the aims and activities of the United Nations. ICFTU statements, in fact, represent policy adopted by its statutory executive bodies.

While ICFTU welcomes the desire to involve NGOs from developing countries, we are seriously disturbed by the recent tendency to label organizations as "Northern" or "Southern" on the basis of the location of their headquarters. Clearly what matters is neither the site of their headquarters nor the nationality of their representatives to United Nations offices but their

constituencies and the reflection of these constituencies in their policy-making organs.

Not only ICFTU, but many other international organizations, are overwhelmingly composed of third world organizations and have their own regional groupings. For instance, ICFTU is usually represented in regional commissions - the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) - and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) by its own regional organizations. It would be most unfortunate if the United Nations were to establish procedures which would have the effect of devaluating and discouraging international solidarity in the non-governmental sector.

ICFTU is confident that ways can be found to enlarge and enhance cooperation between the United Nations and NGOs without curtailing the rights and privileges without which genuinely representative organizations are not able to exercise a significant function. One area where action would be welcome is that of participation in international conferences. Here greater consistency is clearly needed. While we understand the need for involving more specific interest groups, we nevertheless insist on the importance of making a distinction between NGOs representing major constituencies and smaller groups, and any recommendations to form coalitions should be reserved to the latter.

A very effective way of associating NGOs with the work of the United Nations is the inclusion of their representatives as advisers in governmental delegations. While only a few Member States have regularly followed this practice up to now, recent meetings of preparatory committees for conferences have shown that it is gaining ground, with positive results.

As regards the arrangements governing the day-to-day work of NGOs in consultative status, we urge the Working Group to take a realistic approach to any suggestions for change in order to ensure that action aimed at greater liberalization will not in effect lead to greater restrictions and open doors will not lead into a blind alley.

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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the International Council of Jewish Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category II

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of the Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. The International Council of Jewish Women (ICJW), a non-governmental organization, was granted category II consultative status with the Economic and Social Council in 1964. To fulfil its responsibilities, ICJW appoints official representatives and alternates to serve in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Paris and to attend regular sessions of the General Assembly, the Council and its various commissions, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The ICJW representatives work in cooperation with other international and national organizations engaged in United Nations activities. On the basis of ICJW consultative status, they participate directly in the work of the above-mentioned United Nations bodies, submitting written statements in the name of ICJW and meeting with Secretariat staff members. Regular reports as well as directives are sent to the ICJW affiliates to enable them to carry out their

* E/AC.70/1994/2.

United Nations-related programmes which are within the purview of ICJW. There is also a flow of information from the affiliates to the United Nations through the ICJW representatives.

2. Resolutions of ICJW are concerned with such national affairs as education, health and welfare, ethical guidelines for medical research, environment and habitat, the status of women, and youth and successor generations, as well as with such world affairs as peace in the Middle East, the United Nations and human rights, the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, disarmament, UNICEF, racism, racial discrimination and intolerance. Topical statements are issued regularly relating to some or all of the aforementioned subjects.

3. NGO representatives attend regional meetings of the Economic and Social Council and make their views known to Member States. ICJW is aware of the increasing number of newly independent States (e.g. the former Soviet Republics) and is establishing contacts with new affiliates there. ICJW is also represented in parts of the South and the developing world (South Africa, Zimbabwe and seven countries of Latin America) and is strengthening relationships between North and South through very open communication and help with local issues and concerns.

4. Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) has provided for the Council to secure expert information or advice from organizations having specific competence and enabling these organizations to express their views in these fields of activity. ICJW places great emphasis on combating racial intolerance and other gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. ICJW believes it should continue to have the right to express its views orally and to circulate written statements in its areas of expertise. It further believes that its representatives should continue to sit at public meetings of the Council without having to reiterate its status for every meeting it attends. Rules governing United Nations conferences should be standardized and not subject to change at every venue. NGOs should not be denied the right to talk to delegates or to gather United Nations documents when United Nations meetings take place. NGOs have lost their resource centre in the Secretariat, and as a consequence often find they miss important meetings because there is no central bulletin board for notices. NGOs can no longer bring guests into the United Nations building, even though the guests may be visiting experts or VIPs. There is also talk of eliminating all NGO meetings at Headquarters.

5. It is for these reasons that ICJW believes the consultative status of NGOs is being jeopardized and calls for improvement in the situation as soon as possible.

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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the International Chamber of Commerce, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* * *

1. The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement to the Open-Ended Working Group under item 3 of its agenda.

2. The ICC is an international non-governmental organization which has enjoyed category I consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1946. It was the first NGO to be admitted to that official relationship with the United Nations. The ICC feels that this relationship has been a mutually beneficial one - one which it values highly and is working to enhance and strengthen, in response to recent expressions of interest by both Governments and the Secretary-General of the United Nations in a greater contribution by NGOs to the work of the Organization.

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

3. The emergence of such issues as sustainable development and job creation on the agendas of high-level United Nations meetings and the accompanying calls for the business community actively to cooperate in dealing with them has underscored the role of the ICC as an interlocutor between business and industry and the United Nations.

4. To the extent that the decision taken by the Economic and Social Council to undertake, through the Open-Ended Working Group, a general review of the arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations set out in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) is based on a desire to develop deeper and more meaningful links with the NGO community, the ICC welcomes the exercise. In this regard, it would like to reaffirm its view, expressed on previous occasions that the United Nations should be open to truly representative non-governmental organizations as broadly as feasible.

5. The ICC recognizes that the circumstances in which Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) was adopted have changed and that Governments may wish to consider whether certain modifications should be made. As suggested above, the ICC feels that the review should basically look to expanding the substantive involvement of the non-governmental sector in the activities of the United Nations. More specifically, the process should have as a principal outcome the confirmation of the participatory rights and privileges of NGOs admitted to consultative status which are set forth in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) rather than their curtailment. For the ICC, the core of such rights and privileges is the appropriate opportunity formally to bring to the attention of delegates the views of its constituents on matters under consideration in the Council or any of its subsidiary bodies. At the same time, the ICC recognizes that it is incumbent upon it to ensure that its constituents are fully informed of the objectives of the United Nations in fields where the cooperation of business and industry may be important.

6. The ICC believes that the basic rules embodied in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) still have validity and should not be done away with. In particular, if the United Nations and the non-governmental community are to derive maximum benefit from the consultative process, the very real distinction between NGOs that are truly global in scope, representing important constituencies with broad concerns whose support of a range of Untied Nations objectives can make an essential contribution to their achievement, and those with only a limited membership and a narrow focus of interest should be retained.

7. In this connection, the ICC feels that to describe NGOs as southern or northern on the basis of the location of their headquarters and whether they maintain permanent representation at United Nations Headquarters is misleading and does not reflect the actual situation. The ICC, for example, has from time to time been referred to as a "northern" NGO. In fact, it is a genuinely global organization with members in 137 countries, North and South, industrialized and developing and in transition to a market economy. This world-wide representation of the private sector is reflected in the composition of the ICC governing body - its Council - where 33 of the 58 members are from countries that are members of the Group of 77. And the Presidency of the ICC rotates

among countries of both the North and South. Its current President is a well-known Indian businessman.

8. The question of accreditation of NGOs to United Nations conferences is closely related to the management of continuing consultative arrangements because of the tendency towards "spillover" from the former into the regular meetings of subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council. The ICC appreciates the practice under which participation in United Nations conferences, including anv preparatory activities, is normally open to relevant NGOs already in consultative status. It would hope that the rules for such participation could be similar to those governing the consultative process in the Council. The ICC believes that participation in United Nations conferences should also be open to NGOs not in consultative status but whose relevance and legitimacy have been established under procedures that are orderly, transparent and consistent. It would, of course, be open to any such organization wishing to do so also to move to acquire "permanent" consultative status with the Council through whatever separate set of procedures govern that process.

9. The ICC looks forward to the Working Group building on the positive aspects of existing arrangements and past experience so as to open new avenues of NGO cooperation in the work of the United Nations. It wishes to be as helpful as possible in this endeavour.

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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Associations of the Elderly, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. On behalf of associations established in 42 countries spanning five continents with a membership of 100 million, FIAPA sees no need to amend the current arrangements relating to the recognition and classification of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in connection with the granting of consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

2. FIAPA, whichever category it is included in, would, however, wish to see coordination at the United Nations result in a single unit being made responsible for relations with NGOs.

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

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3. It is the view of FIAPA that such coordination could be achieved by expanding the role and responsibilities of the unit currently responsible for relations with NGOs within the Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

4. The United Nations, in facilitating cooperation with NGOs, would benefit in that NGOs can make a specific and effective contribution to the Organization in their respective fields of activity.

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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the World Federation of United Nations Associations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. The members of the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) look forward to working with the Open-Ended Working Group to assess the methods through which the community of non-governmental organizations may most effectively contribute to the deliberations of United Nations governmental groups. There are many ways in which various United Nations bodies relate to non-governmental organizations, including the wide array of sustainable development and humanitarian assistance activities. NGOs also have a long history of supporting the United Nations information services both within their own constituencies and to wider audiences.

2. Today we are exploring the unique system established by the Economic and Social Council to include non-governmental organizations as participants in the ongoing efforts to develop policies designed to further the well-being of the

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

people of the world. The role of NGOs as observers and contributors to the debates which have continued during the past 45 years is the issue before us. Has it been helpful, constructive, innovative? The answer surely is "yes" more often than not.

3. When the representatives of international NGOs offer views in the debates they are speaking of positions which cut across many geographic boundaries. The large NGOs - many of which have status in category I - not only include substantial numbers of members but also arrive at policy positions through a consensus-building process. Thus a valuable consensus view is added to those expressed by individual countries. Other NGOs may add the collective expertise of members with a common profession or dedication.

4. International NGOs are the counterpart to the United Nations, indeed many of them antedate the United Nations by decades. They were in the forefront of demonstrating the value to human welfare of international cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experience among a diversity of groups. It is this experience which is made available to the intergovernmental bodies as they seek to build firmer institutions.

5. We must recognize that coalitions which cross national boundaries are still developing entities - whether governmental or non-governmental. It is important that we mutually reinforce the institutions that are being built so laboriously. Working together on the many issues which confront us can strengthen the bonds among Governments and within the international NGOs.

6. This is a part of the reciprocal commitment inherent in the system outlined in Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV): the United Nations provides access to the policy makers and in return receives advice, criticism and proposals for needed action. It can be shown that many United Nations programmes arise from concerns formulated by NGOs - among others, the steady deterioration of the global environment was demonstrated by several groups whose advocacy persuaded Governments to convene the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972.

7. Aside from the dramatic occasion of a global conference, there are other results of NGO initiatives, such as constructive assistance programmes or a convention against torture or one on the rights of the child. Because NGOs have a commitment to the United Nations through the system of consultative status, they not only provide the stimulus to move forward but they also assist in the implementation of decisions, whether it is to disseminate information, to encourage further participation or to organize field projects.

8. To revert to the system under Council resolution 1296 (XLIV). A key to its success is the opportunity it permits for NGO representation, as observers, in the continuing process of policy development. NGO representatives become sensitive to the concerns of the Governments, identify the delegates who are the players, and learn how to intervene most effectively - it may be formally through circulated documents or oral statements, or it may be informally. In either case, it is essential that the NGO representatives have access to the sessions of the various bodies and to documentation in time.

9. In recent years the number of members of the United Nations has more than tripled. There is no universal count of the number of NGOs that came into being during this period, but we are all aware that it has been very substantial as people in all countries have come together to solve their problems or to support each other in a variety of tasks.

10. How can this human dynamo be brought into an effective partnership with the intergovernmental system established by the Charter of the United Nations? We believe that the system devised in the early years is valid, should be preserved, modified if necessary and expanded to include all the bodies of the United Nations. Both partners must consider how they can best use and implement the system. Governments can help by indicating what activities they have found useful and by working on establishing processes which facilitate NGO participation. The NGOs must look at the growing number of organizations of all kinds and think about bringing them together under different umbrellas and recognize that new styles of organization are possible in this era of modern communications.

11. Perhaps the question is how to bring flexibility into an ongoing firm reciprocal commitment. NGOs identified as representative of important constituencies and that are prepared to work consistently on issues where they can make contributions should have a permanent status. They can be called upon for advice throughout the process of developing positions and they can in turn alert the intergovernmental bodies to emerging problems and issues. Meanwhile other devices such as the hearings recently convened on the Agenda for Development could bring in a wider range of views - representatives of networks and caucuses, as well as academic specialists, could be brought into these ad hoc events. An especially interesting aspect of hearings is the opportunity they offer for some real dialogue among the participants. Perhaps more of this could take place in the formal sessions of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

12. As more groups seek to enter the international arena two forces inevitably come into play. One is the great diversity among NGOs - each is established for some purpose dear to the hearts of its members - which requires some degree of individual autonomy and maintenance of individual rights for NGOs. The other is the need to encourage more cooperation and coalition-building. There are many examples of this in practice. The Conference of NGOs has for many years formed committees around major issues, such as human rights, status of women, human settlements, substance abuse, ageing and the family, for the purpose of sharing information and of identifying common positions.

13. The activity in recent years around major conferences has led to the formation of voluntary caucuses based on geographic regions or various relevant issues. The Council might consider a more systematic arrangement to permit representatives of these groups to make presentations at appropriate moments. It must always be understood that spokespersons can speak only for those who choose to subscribe to the views that are expressed. In the interest of ensuring the submission of innovative ideas we must resist the temptation to find a lowest common denominator of consensus among the largest number of people.

Conferences

14. The conferences of the past 20 years have played a significant role in generating NGO interest in the work of the United Nations. It is, of course, a purpose of these conferences to focus global attention on different aspects of development: environment, population, habitat, transfer of science and technology and women's participation among others. Efforts are made to have all Governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the media actively engage in the preparations for conferences and support the results. Following the excitement of reaching a global consensus the hard work of implementing it takes place at the local level among the people most concerned. The enthusiasm generated must be translated into programmes and projects on the ground.

15. The Review Working Group should make a distinction between the arrangements made for encouraging and facilitating NGO participation in the conference process and those made for continuing participation in the work of the functional commissions and other bodies of the Council. The current arrangements, outlined in a series of resolutions for recent conferences, have the merit of opening the process to all organizations which demonstrate their legitimacy, interest and relevance while retaining the concept that NGOs with consultative status have a commitment to contribute to a major United Nations issue. On the other hand, Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) remains a viable base for implementing a continuing relationship with international NGOs.

Other United Nations bodies

16. For many years disarmament has been a prime issue for many of the NGOs related to the Council. The NGO committees working in this field have been among the most active. Today, as the United Nations seeks new approaches to peacé-keeping and peacemaking, NGOs are cooperating in many ventures. They should be encouraged to participate in policy development so that their subsequent actions can be most effective. Their role in conferences is well established, whether it is an Economic and Social Council or General Assembly enterprise. This review may be able to recommend elements of the consultative system which should be applied to other General Assembly bodies.

Consistency

17. It is becoming imperative that some standard and consistent arrangements be in place for the NGOs. Far too much time is spent by representatives seeking clarification about where, when and how they may participate. This applies to the work of the Council and its constituent bodies as well as to the ad hoc conferences.

18. Another important point that must be considered is the internal United Nations structure to ensure effective functioning of the NGO system. This requires a more consistent flow of information, access to documents in time to bring considered views to the table and access to United Nations buildings and meeting rooms.

19. In the light of the expanding role of NGOs, the central Secretariat should be placed in a position to relate to all relevant secretariats - perhaps in the Secretary-General's office as previously proposed. The decentralization of daily work with NGOs as groups or constituencies are identified may be a subject for this review. However, as different secretariat units develop relations with groups of NGOs it is important that there be consistent coordination among them.

20. We look forward to working with the members of this Working Group to enhance the system of United Nations/NGO relationships and to permit it to flourish during the coming decades.